

EXHIBIT 5
DATE 1-29-09
HB 253

Ladies and gentlemen of the House Committee on Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, my name is Ilona Popper and I live in Gardiner, Montana. I endorse HB 253, which designates bison as a "valued, native wildlife" and restores management of the animals to Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

My town, Gardiner, is the northern gateway to Yellowstone NP and is also surrounded by national forest land. Our economy is supported by ranching, trophy hunting, recreation, biological research, and tourism.

In Gardiner, bison are truly a *valued* wildlife. Bison are essential to our economy. They have been essential to *my* economy, and my vocation. I worked for one of many local tour guide companies, giving wildlife tours in the park. Clients asked to see wolves and bears, and we did and it was great, but the bison stole the show. The herds were massing together by the hundreds, beginning the rut: males growling, calves darting in and out of safety. My clients begged to stay longer. Bison are a major draw to tourists, professional photographers, and wildlife biologists. They feature in my work as a freelance writer about wildlife and they wander in and out of in my lifelong work as a poet.

Bison are part of our community in Gardiner. We see bison daily—on my road, in town, or in Yellowstone Park. Bison are *native wildlife* here. The roads we travel were cut by bison long before first peoples, and then our ancestors, took them over, long before we paved them. In March, bison cows gather on and around my road to calve. Bison are neighbors—wild, different, and sometimes similar to our selves. Once, I saw a cow bellowing and sniffing her dead calf, while her herd created a block to keep cars away from the grieving mother.

Many migrating wildlife pose a disease threat to livestock, yet bison, which are a lesser threat, remain the only wild ungulate managed by the Department of Livestock. This approach is out of date and ineffective. We humans have often eliminated or devastatingly exploited wild species before we have understood them or learned from them. Some species however have taught us things that help us understand and save human lives. We can learn and gain things we may not yet imagine from bison: pragmatic, scientific things; economic things; ineffable things. But, it's time to acknowledge and manage bison for what they are: wildlife, *valued, native wildlife*. Thank you.

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SB 253 Montana Wild Buffalo Recovery and Conservation Act.